

## Message Text

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47

ACTION EA-06

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R 030915Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9588

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 3832

LIMDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, CB, MOPS

SUBJECT: SECURITY DETERIORATES IN BATTAMBANG

1. EMBASSY HAS BEEN RECEIVING REPORTS FROM DIFFERENT AMERICAN SOURCES WHICH CLEARLY POINT UP THE RAPIDLY DETERIORATING SECURITY SITUATION IN BATTAMBANG PROVINCE. THIS WESTERN PROVINCE, THE RICE BOWL OF CAMBODIA, HAS HERETOFORE BEEN SPARED MUCH OF THE INTENSIVE WARFARE TO WHICH THE EASTERN PART OF THE COUNTRY HAS BEEN ACCUSTOMED. THE ENEMY CLEARLY WON A MILITARY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VICTORY BY CHASING THE GOVERNMENT FORCES FROM THE TOWN OF MAUNG RUSSEI AND CAPTURING OR DESTROYING THE AMPLE RICE STOCKS STORED THERE. THERE IS NOW ALSO A GENERAL IMPRESSION THAT THE KC CAN PICK AND CHOOSE THEIR TARGET IN BATTAMBANG AT WILL AND THAT FANK HAS NO RESERVE FORCES IN THE PROVINCE TO DEFEND EFFECTIVELY ANY SITE ATTACKED BY THE ENEMY. IN BATTAMBANG CITY ITSELF THE ANTI-CHINESE DEMONSTRATIONS AND RIOTS HAVE PRESENTLY QUIETED DOWN BUT THEY REFLECT THE POPULATION'S FRUSTRATION WITH FANK'S INABILITY TO COPE WITH THE MILITARY THREAT AND THE CHINESE ARE MADE THE SCAPEGOAT FOR THE SETBACKS.

2. UNFORTUNATELY FANK HAS NO INTERVENTION BRIGADE WHICH CAN BE SPARED TO BE SENT TO BATTAMBANG. THE 38TH BRIGADE, WHICH USED TO BE GARRISONED IN BATTAMBANG, WAS  
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EARLIER BROUGHT TO PHNOM PENH TO ASSIST IN THE DEFENSE

OF THE CAPITAL. THE NEW PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR, MAJOR GENERAL SAR HOR, IS AN HONEST MAN BUT THE POPULATION HAS BLAMED HIM FOR THE MILITARY SETBACKS WHICH HAVE OCCURRED EVER SINCE HE TOOK COMMAND IN BATTAMBANG. PETITIONS HAVE BEEN SENT TO PHNOM PENH ASKING THAT MAJOR GENERAL SEK SAM IET, THE FORMER GOVERNOR, BE BROUGHT BACK TO BATTAMBANG. HE WAS NOTORIOUS FOR HIS CORRUPTION BUT AT LEAST HE KEPT THE PROVINCE TOGETHER MILITARILY.

3. ON FEB. 28 THE MARSHAL SENT THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR TO SEE ME TO INQUIRE WHETHER I THOUGHT MAJOR GENERAL SAR HOR SHOULD BE RELIEVED. I SUGGESTED THAT PERHAPS SEK SAM IET MIGHT BE SENT ON A TEMPORARY MISSION TO HELP SAR HOR REESTABLISH SOME ORDER IN THE PROVINCE. AT THIS STAGE, I SAID, WHAT COUNTED WAS TO GAIN TIME AND I HOPED THAT THE TWO MAJOR GENERALS WOULD BE ABLE TO WORK TOGETHER, RATHER THAN FORCING THE WITHDRAWAL OF SAR HOR, WHO AFTER ALL HAD BEEN SENT THERE IN ORDER TO CLEAN UP THE CORRUPTION IN THE PROVINCE. I HAVE BEEN INFORMED THIS MORNING THAT GENERAL SAR HOR WILL BE RELIEVED TOMORROW, MARCH 4, AND SEK SAM IET WILL TAKE CHARGE AGAIN. THUS THE MAN WHO IS WIDELY ALLEGED TO HAVE PROFITTED CORRUPTLY AND IMMENSELY FROM HIS POSITION IN BATTAMBANG WILL BE BACK IN THE SADDLE AGAIN, BUT HOPEFULLY HE WILL BE MORE EFFECTIVE MILITARILY AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY THAN THE HONEST BUT MORIBUND SAR HOR.

4. WE ARE SENDING AN AMERICAN MILITARY OFFICER TO BATTAMBANG FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS IN ORDER TO GIVE US A FIRST-HAND REPORT ON THE SITUATION THERE.  
DEAN

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NNN

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